DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 236 692 CS 207 975

AUTHOR Gaziano, Cecilie
TITLE The Influence of New Media and Citizen Groups on the Knowledge Gap in an Inner-City Neighborhood.
PUB DATE 21 May 82
NOTE 38p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (37th, Hunt Valley, MD, May 21, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Citizen Participation; Community Attitudes; *Community Organizations; Content Analysis; *Information Dissemination; Information Sources; Inner City; *Knowledge Level; *Mass Media Effects; Media Research; *Newspapers; News Reporting; *Urban Problems

ABSTRACT

Focusing on knowledge of four public affairs issues important to residents of a Midwestern inner-city neighborhood, a study examined the relative contributions to knowledge made by two neighborhood newspapers and by organized community group activities. A sample of 239 residents was asked open-ended questions about housing, crime, economic development, and school issues. A purposive sample of 52 leaders of neighborhood organizations interested in those specific issues was also interviewed, and two neighborhood newspapers were content analyzed for several months prior to the interviewing. The major findings were that (1) high levels of organized group activity were related to larger knowledge gaps, which was contrary to expectations; (2) high levels of community neighborhood newspaper publicity about issues appeared to lead to reduced knowledge disparities; (3) contrary to previous findings, conflict appeared not to have contributed to reduced knowledge gaps; (4) distributing information more widely did not necessarily lead to equalization of knowledge; and (5) organized groups' information strategies may have contributed to higher knowledge levels among the least educated. (Extensive tables of data are appended.) (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED236692

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

THE INFLUENCE OF NEW MEDIA AND CITIZEN GROUPS ON THE KNOWLEDGE GAP IN AN INNER-CITY NEIGHBORHOOD

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Cecilie Gaziano

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Cecilie Gaziano
Ph.D. Candidate
School of Journalism and Mass Communication
University of Minnesota

Mailing address:
4511 Fremont Ave. S.
Minneapolis, MN 55409
Phone (612) 825-8887

CS 207975

Presented to the 37th Annual Conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, Hunt Valley Inn, Hunt Valley, Maryland, May 21, 1982.

THE INFLUENCE OF NEW MEDIA AND CITIZEN GROUPS ON THE KNOWLEDGE GAP IN AN INNER-CITY NEIGHBORHOOD

Inequalities in knowledge frequently are defined as a social problem, especially since inequities tend to increase under some conditions and run counter to the fundamental assumption that an informed citizenry is essential to a democracy (Lamberton, 1974; Smith, 1975; Nie, 1970; Parker and Dunn, 1972; Suominen, 1976; Tichenor, Donohue and Olien, 1970, 1980).[1]

There is a widespread belief that such knowledge gaps mean that the disadvantaged are denied an equal opportunity to participate in public opinion and decision-making processes in society. This social problem is of particular interest in the context of declining cities, plagued with rising numbers of disadvantaged residents and the attendant problems of stability and increasing social disparities.

Seldom is the ideal of an informed public fulfilled. Surveys frequently reconfirm the existence of the chronic "Know-Nothings" identified early in the history of public opinion research (Hyman and Sheatsley, 1947). The information ideal seldom is achieved, particularly in the areas of election information (Converse, 1962), consumer affairs, personal health, housing, law, education (Childers with Post, 1975), and welfare resources and caretaking agencies (Dervin and Greenberg, 1972). Knowledge differentials are exacerbated by the relatively recent change in the structure of the post-industrial economy which increasingly "is based largely on the allocation of information" (Smith, 1975:15).

The research discussed in this paper focuses on knowledge of four public affairs issues potentially important to the residents of a Midwestern inner-city neighborhood which has one of the highest concentrations of low income, elderly, and minority groups in that city. The purpose of the study is to examine the potential impact of new types of neighborhood newspapers which report primarily on public affairs issues and frequently address concerns of the disadvantaged. Two of these papers circulate within the neighborhood. The study concentrates on the relative contributions of the newspapers and the activity of organizations to the neighborhood residents' knowledge of these issues.

The Evidence for Knowledge Gaps

The existence of inequalities in knowledge of public affairs issues has been well demonstrated. Introduction of a formal knowledge gap hypothesis has stimulated much recent research and comment. It states:

> As the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of the population with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire this information at a faster rate than the lower status segments, so that the gap in knowledge between these segments tends to increase rather than decrease (Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, 1970:150-60).

The gap is expected to be revealed over time by comparison of rates of knowledge acquisition of well-publicized topics among population strata differing in socioeconomic status (SES). At any single point in time, correlations are predicted to be higher between knowledge and education for more highly publicized subjects than for less widely covered content.

Public opinion poll data tend to support the proposition that the higher the education, the greater the knowledge of various topics (Erskine, 1962, 1963a-c; Robinson, 1967, 1972; Wade and Schramm, 1969; Frazier, 1981).

Studies of the diffusion of news often have corroborated such a proposition (Bogart, 1950-51; Medalia and Larsen, 1958; Deutschmann and Danielson, 1960; Budd, MacLean and Barnes, 1966; Allen and Colfax, 1968; Adams, Mullens, and Wilson, 1969). Many other studies report positive relationships between knowledge and education for a variety of topics and settings (McNelly and Molina, 1972; Benton and Frazier, 1976; Edelstein, 1973; McNelly, Rush and Bishop, 1968; Star and Hughes, 1950; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, 1954; and Olien, Tichenor and Donohue, 1982).

Conditions Affecting Magnitude of Gaps

There are conditions under which inequities in knowledge do not occur or increase, and sometimes gaps decrease over time.

For example, all respondents knew the news of the assassination of President Kennedy by the time of interviewing; this event received concentrated and simultaneous media coverage (Greenberg, 1964).[2] Only a minute gap appeared when Neuman (1976) tested aided and unaided recall of televised network news.[3] A greater percentage of residents in a laboring community had heard of the death of Senator Robert A. Taft when compared with residents in a more prosperous university faculty community (Larsen and Hill, 1954).[4] Palmgreen (1979) found education to be a strong predictor of knowledge of national political issues but not of information on local issues, even when media coverage varied. An extensive information campaign led to a decrease in a health knowledge gap in a Midwestern community (Brown, Ettema, and Luepker, 1981).[5] An initial moderate gap in factual knowledge (names, dates, figures) of two contrasting issues decreased during a ten-day period of media coverage on the issues (Genova and Greenberg, 1979). A small gap did increase slightly for structural

knowledge (relationships, reasons) of one topic, but there was no change in the moderate structural knowledge gap for another subject.

In investigations of local issues in a number of communities in a Midwestern state, some conditions have been identified which may reduce differences in knowledge: a) high levels of interpersonal communication about the issue, b) high levels of media coverage of the issue, c) high levels of perceived conflict in the issue, d) relatively high homogeneity of the community as opposed to heterogeneity of population in other communities, e) high level of basic concern of the issue for the community, f) declining public attention to the issue over time, and g) local scope of issue as opposed to national scope (Tichenor, et al, 1973, 1980; Donohue, et al, 1975).

The Neighborhood Press

The development of new urban neighborhood-based media may have implications for knowledge differentials of the disadvantaged, since this press frequently concentrates on reporting of local public affairs issues of interest to low SES persons.

Some data show that neighborhood residents, including minorities, the poor, and the elderly, are familiar with and use the neighborhood papers in the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota (Anderson and Berdie, 1975, 1976, 1978a-d; Gaziano, 1974; Linnes, 1980). In addition, although education and other SES indicators tend to be positively correlated with use of print media, low SES and minority groups show relatively high use of print media which are geared specifically to their interests (Dervin and Greenberg, 1972; Lyle, 1967; Tan and Vaughn, 1976). Newspaper circulation is not necessarily low in inner cities (Block, 1970; Greenberg and Dervin, 1970; Sargent and Stempel, 1968).

The new media of interest to this study have been reported in a number of areas -- New York City; Boston, Lynn, and Lowell, Massachusetts; St. Louis, Missouri; Chicago; Washington, D.C.; Cleveland, Ohio; Minneapolis and St. Paul; and Ottawa, Canada (City Almanac, 1969; Conason, 1975; Frankovich, 1974; Ward and Gaziano, 1976, 1978; Gaziano and Ward, 1978; Jeffres and Dobos, 1982; Weissman, 1970; Worthy, 1976; Remmenga, 1961; Deacy, 1971; Winder, 1972; MacGregor, 1979).[6]

These papers tend to contrast with the 82 community papers in center-city Chicago in Janowitz's well-known study (1952). That press, mainly weeklies with paid circulations, avoided controversy and took editorial stands only when it was necessary to communicate the community's concerns to outsiders.[7] The Chicago community press may be characterized as traditional, more like small-town newspapers than the new urban neighborhood press is.

Most of the neighborhood papers in the Twin Cities, for example, are non-profit monthlies, advised by citizen boards, oriented toward public affairs content rather than "bulletin-board" content, and more likely to report on conflicts.[8]

Several factors contributed to development of the new press. One is the population shift of high SES groups to the suburbs and the increase in low SES residents in the center city, related to declining economic bases in many large, older U.S. cities (Frey, 1980), and to increased political competition for local resources (Janowitz, 1978). Another factor is the movement toward increased representation of low-power groups in society which can be characterized as a "participationism" movement,or a "participation revolution" as Milbrath and Goel (1977) have termed it. One aspect of this is the renewed interest in neighborhood power which has been called

"a movement for local control in cities across the land" (Kotler, 1969:x). This movement has gained strength with organization of local groups into national associations (Janowitz, 1978). Facilitating factors include government requirements of communication with citizens and maximum feasible citizen participation (implemented less frequently in the 1980's than in the 1960's and 1970's).

Also contributing to the growth of the neighborhood press is the shift in metropolitan daily newspaper orientation from the center city to the suburbs. Dailies tend to be oriented toward high SES individuals and power structures (Bagdikian, 1981; Dreier, 1982). Urban neighborhoods, feeling their concerns neglected, have sought voices for their interests through organized groups and neighborhood newspapers. Some neighborhood papers are closely linked to neighborhood organizations, especially residents' associations.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The neighborhood press appears to have the potential to reach disadvantaged groups, a necessary condition for the reduction of knowledge gaps.

The studies with evidence about knowledge disparities, taken together, suggest that knowledge gaps may frequently be lower on local issues than on national issues. Furthermore, there may be conditions under which increased media coverage of these local issues may lead to a further reduction in the gap between more and less educated segments of the population. Such reductions may be especially likely to occur for topics of special concern to disadvantaged groups.

Organized group activity is a vital component in the public opinion process. Media tend to respond to this activity in their definition of problems and solutions. Organized groups' media strategies frequently lead to an acceleration of public attention to issues, thereby contributing to narrowed knowledge gaps (Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien, 1980). Some research indicates that a high degree of organization of interest groups is related to high mass media attention and to high levels of public knowledge of publicized issues (Tichenor, Olien and Donohue, 1977). Other research has shown that high perceived levels of conflict, often associated with organized group activity, are related to high knowledge levels and to reduced knowledge gaps (Tichenor, Rodenkirchen, Olien, and Donohue, 1973).

The Hypotheses

H_1: The greater the level of organized group activity on the issues, the smaller the gap in knowledge about the issues between the higher and lower SES segments of the neighborhood.

H_2: Under conditions of a high level of organized group activity on the issues:

The greater the level of neighborhood newspaper attention to the issue, the smaller the knowledge gap between higher and lower SES segments.

H_3: Under conditions of a low level of organized group activity on the issues:

The greater the level of neighborhood newspaper attention to the issue, the greater the knowledge gap.

Level of organized group activity is therefore conceptualized as a basic factor in creation and reduction of knowledge inequities. When levels

of both group activity and media coverage are high, gaps are expected to narrow. This is because group activity stimulates communication throughout the system. High media coverage which is generated by that group activity disseminates information which is of high interest to a wide variety of groups in the community, presumably including those which are less advantaged.

However, when groups are less active and media coverage is high, gaps are expected to be large since information acquisition under these conditions tends to be limited to those high status groups that acquire information on all public affairs topics as part of their structured role in the community. This is comparable to the previous findings that knowledge gaps are high on non-local issues but often decline with increasing intensity and coverage of local issues. Low levels of group activity imply that the element of conflict is less likely to be present.

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES:

The Phillips neighborhood in south Minneapolis was selected for study. The largest neighborhood in the city, it tends to be predominantly low income and working class, although a shortage of moderate and low-cost housing recently has attracted some middle-class residents as well.

Phillips has had its own non-profit newspaper, The Alley, since 1976, with a circulation of 10,000. Free copies are distributed at local businesses and institutions, and some copies are delivered door-to-door. Advertising is the main source of revenue. The Alley has ties to the neighborhood residents' association. A second paper, Southside News, mailed to 42,000

households in Phillips and eight other nearby neighborhoods, evolved from a Model Cities-supported paper in 1971 to an independent non-profit paper financed by advertising, federal subsidy, and foundation grants. (It ceased publication in fall 1980 because of lack of funds.) It contained an additional publication, Community Times, carried also by two other neighborhood papers under the same management. Although Southside News was semi-monthly, residents received one free issue a month unless they paid a subscription fee.

Four issues varying in levels of organizational activity and neighborhood newspaper coverage[9] were chosen: a) housing, including availability and quality; b) economic development, including employment needs and departing businesses; c) schools and education, including needs of inner-city children, quality of instruction, and discipline difficulties; and d) crime and vandalism, a special concern since Phillips has one of the highest crime rates in the city.

Interviews with neighborhood leaders, city planners, and neighborhood press staff members indicated that these issues may strongly appeal to the disadvantaged as well as to other social segments. These issues were chosen in order to address criticisms that many studies have concentrated on issues more important to high SES strata than to low SES segments (Ettema and Kline, 1977; Clarke and Kline, 1974; Dervin, 1980).

All questions about knowledge were open-ended. It has been argued that respondents should be permitted to define knowledge in their own terms with open-ended questions (Edelstein, 1973; Palmgreen, 1979; Clarke and Kline). Respondents were asked to name the most important neighborhood problems and to rank them. They were then asked whether or not they had seen or heard

anything about the housing issue. If they responded affirmatively, queries followed about knowledge of individuals or groups taking actions on the issue, of causes, and of solutions, as well as personal experience, participation in groups interested in the issue, and level of personal interest in it.[10] Questions on the other three issues were then asked, using the same format. Last were inquiries about media use and demographic data.

A random sample of 239 residents was interviewed by telephone between mid-March and the first week of April 1980.[11] A letter describing the study and requesting cooperation preceded contacts. Interviews were completed among 68 percent of contacts with eligible members of the sample.[12]

Knowledge scores were computed for each respondent by summing up the number of all discrete elements of information mentioned by each respondent.[13]

Also interviewed was a purposive sample of 52 leaders of organizations which had some relationship to one or more of the issues. These groups, referred to as "informants" in this paper, included residents' associations, Indian organizations,[14] schools, churches, and several social service organizations, among others. Organization representatives answered the same questions as the residents' sample and a few questions about the organizations (46 interviews were in-person and six were by telephone).

All issues of the two neighborhood newspapers were content-analyzed for the period of November 1979 to mid-March 1980.

The two independent variables are: a) level of organized group activity on the issue (as measured by number of respondents' mentions of groups taking actions on the issues--see discussion on page 12 under "Organizational Activities") and b) level of neighborhood newspaper attention to issues

measured by the number of news items in which the issue is mentioned, both as a dominant and a subordinate topic and also by the total length of column inches devoted to the issue when it is the primary subject.

Level of formal education is the indicator of socioeconomic status (SES). Knowledge gap is measured by the strength of the association between level of education and having knowledge about an issue. Those with less than a high school degree constitute the low education groups, those graduating from high school comprise the medium education group, and the high education group is composed of those with some college or more schooling.

RESULTS

Knowledge gap measures are based on proportions of each of the three education groups who have some knowledge of each issue, compared with those without knowledge (tables 1 through 4). The coefficient for the magnitude of the gap is Cramer's V. It was selected instead of Pearsonian correlations because some of the knowledge data are curvilinear and Cramer's V does not assume linearity.

A knowledge gap exists among the education groups for two issues in particular, according to chi square tests on differences in proportions, significant at the .04 level for the crime problem and moderately significant at the .09 level for the housing topic, differences being non-significant for the other issues.

The strongest associations between education and knowledge among the four topics are for the crime issue (V = .165) and for housing (V = .145). The knowledge gap coefficients for economic development and schools/education issues are lower and non-significant.

Larger proportions of the whole sample have knowledge about crime and housing than about the other issues, according to the graph in Figure 1 (based on data in tables 1-4). Also, larger proportions of the less educated groups have knowledge of these issues (compared with knowledge of other issues although knowledge gaps occur for these two issues). These results illustrate the point that increasing levels of knowledge does not necessarily mean increasing equality of knowledge.

Neighborhood Newspaper Coverage

Housing received the most attention of the four issues from both newspapers. One paper treated schools/education[15] and economic development fairly equally, but the other emphasized economic development more, so that the latter issue ranks second in overall coverage, and schools/education is third. Crime is the least-reported subject of the four for the content-analysis period.

Organizational Activities

Two measures of organizational activity were utilized. One is based on informants' (organization leaders) perceptions of activity and the other is the neighborhood resident respondents' perceptions of activity.

Neighborhood residents perceived greatest activity on the crime and housing issues and the least activity on the economic development and schools/education issues.[16] In contrast, informants tended to view housing and economic development as the high activity issues.[17] Residents and informants ranked the issues in the same order except for crime which residents ranked first and informants ranked fourth.

The resident respondents' reports are taken as the measure because it appeared that their high awareness of block clubs (the major type of

organization activity on the crime issue) and their high participation in block clubs indicated a more accurate report of the level of activity on the crime issue in that neighborhood. Block clubs, which have a leader on each participating block, were not represented in the informants' sample. Although residents' familiarity with block clubs was high, informants seemed unaware of the level of this activity in the neighborhood. This type of activity is structurally different from the other groups represented in the informants' sample, quite distinct from established traditional groups in the community. Block clubs are grass roots organizations which have a liaison with a single law enforcement agency. Members interact with each other within their own clubs but are not likely to have formal ties to other block clubs or to communicate frequently with the umbrella coordinating agency.

How Levels of Coverage and Activity Vary

Table 5 depicts the conditions into which the issues fit according to variations in neighborhood newspaper publicity and group activity. Each of the four cells in the table shows the type of knowledge gap predicted.

Support for the Hypotheses

The findings which appear in Table 6 (based on data in tables 1-4) may be compared with the hypothesized relationships in Table 5.

H_1: The greater the level of organized group activity on the issues, the smaller the gap in knowledge about the issues between the higher and lower SES segments of the neighborhood.

Not Supported: small knowledge gaps were predicted for the high group activity issues, housing and crime, but the opposite results were found.

The knowledge gap coefficients (Cramer's V) are low for all four issues; however, the largest associations occur for the crime and housing problems.

H_2: Under conditions of a high level of organized group activity on the issues:

The greater the level of neighborhood newspaper attention to the issue, the smaller the knowledge gap between higher and lower SES segments.

Supported: testing this hypothesis requires comparison of the two high activity topics, housing and crime. The data are in the predicted direction -- the smaller knowledge gap results for the high-publicity topic, housing, according to comparison of the knowledge gap coefficients.

H_3: Under conditions of a low level of organized group activity on the issues:

The greater the level of neighborhood newspaper attention to the issue, the greater the knowledge gap.

Not Supported: when the low activity topics are compared with each other (economic development and schools/education), the topic with greater neighborhood paper publicity (economic development) evidences a slightly smaller knowledge gap coefficient, contrary to prediction, although differences between the two coefficients are slight.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The issue for which the strongest association between education and knowledge was found is crime; the second strongest relationship occurs for the housing problem. In the other two cases, the associations are even lower and relatively similar in magnitude. The results are opposite to prediction of the

first hypothesis, that is, high levels of organized group activity were related to larger knowledge gaps, not smaller ones.

Of the two independent variables, level of organized group activity on the issue appears to have more influence on knowledge gaps than neighborhood newspaper coverage does. Levels of neighborhood press publicity clearly varied for the two high activity issues. This indicates that organizational activity is not dependent upon these papers. The groups' activities appear to affect knowledge levels of higher status segments in the community, and their strategies may be to reach those higher status segments, although the groups often perceive themselves to act on behalf of less advantaged neighborhood residents (as reported in interviews with informants).

However, the results supporting the second hypothesis of smaller knowledge disparities under the condition of high activity and high neighborhood paper publicity indicate that the coverage plays a small role in reducing knowledge differentials. This conclusion is also supported by results contrary to prediction of the third hypothesis, since a smaller knowledge gap was observed for the high publicity issue than for the low publicity issue, although the difference in coefficients is small.

It is especially noteworthy that high coverage did not lead to larger knowledge gaps because these data do not support the original knowledge gap hypothesis, which expects that increased levels of publicity will widen knowledge disparities between higher and lower SES population segments. One potentially important reason is that use of the neighborhood papers appears to be higher among the least educated group than among the medium education and high education groups. Among low education respondents, 75 percent read one neighborhood paper and 83 percent use the other. This contrasts with

readership patterns of the middle education group (somewhat more than half read the first paper and almost three-fourths report reading the second one) and the most educated group (readership is 61 percent and 73 percent, respectively).

In addition, the findings are contrary to those reported by Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1973, 1980) which showed conflict to reduce knowledge gaps. Assuming that conflict is present in the crime and housing issues because organized group activity is highest for those topics, conflict appears not to have narrowed knowledge disparities in this study.

Several other points are noteworthy. First, despite the greater gaps in knowledge of housing and crime issues, the low education and moderate education groups had larger proportions of knowers for these two issues than for the other two, that is, knowledge gaps are highest for those issues for which the overall proportion having knowledge is also highest. This runs counter to the belief often expressed by adult education groups and social scientists that wide distribution of knowledge will lead to equalization of knowledge. It may be that, although knowledge levels of the less educated will increase, they may not catch up with knowledge levels of more educated persons.

Second, groups' information strategies, including neighborhood press strategies, may have contributed to higher knowledge levels among the less educated. In the case of the economic development question, since it was seldom covered by any local media other than neighborhood papers during the study period, activities of groups interested in it may have given the issue visibility through neighborhood press attention. In the case of housing, several organizations oriented toward that issue have ties to one of the

neighborhood papers through board memberships and interpersonal communication patterns (as reported in the informants' interviews). These patterns occur for other issues but to a lesser degree. Housing as a problem in Phillips and similar neighborhoods was covered by other local media during the time of research, and it became a major city election issue later. Little organization information strategy is discernible in the schools/education issue, according to informant data and observation of scant publicity in other local media. The crime issue has several interesting features. One is that block club information strategies do not include activities that attract much neighborhood press coverage or other local media publicity. Another is that the neighborhood papers may have deliberately played down crime coverage and therefore presumably did not contribute to information levels about crime. Several of the leaders interviewed, including those with links to neighborhood papers, said that they would like to see neighborhood crime news de-emphasized in the media because it gives the neighborhood a negative image. (Although other local media do report on crime regularly, this reporting concerns many areas in the city and seldom deals with complex aspects such as causes and solutions.)

SUMMARY

This study focuses on knowledge of four public affairs issues important to residents of a Midwestern inner-city neighborhood which has a large population of the disadvantaged. The purpose of the research was to examine the relative contributions to residents' knowledge made by two neighborhood newspapers and by organized group activity on the issues. Organized activity is a vital component in the public opinion process. In particular,

organizational strategies frequently include attempts to influence media coverage and often lead to an acceleration of public attention to issues. The development of the new neighborhood press may have implications for knowledge differentials of the disadvantaged, since this press often addresses potential concerns of the disadvantaged in its public affairs reporting.

Much prior research has demonstrated the existence of inequalities in public affairs knowledge held by high and low socioeconomic segments of the population, and a formal knowledge gap hypothesis predicts that increases in media publicity will widen knowledge disparities between high and low SES segments. This study was designed to investigate the magnitude of knowledge gaps when neighborhood paper publicity and organized group activity vary.

A random sample of 239 neighborhood residents was interviewed by telephone and asked open-ended questions about housing, crime, economic development, and school issues. A purposive sample of 52 leaders of neighborhood organizations interested in these issues was also interviewed. The two neighborhood papers were content-analyzed for a three-and-half-month period prior to interviewing.

The major findings are:

1. High levels of organized group activity are related to larger knowledge gaps, contrary to expectation.

2. High levels of neighborhood newspaper publicity about issues appear to lead to reduced knowledge disparities, however. This finding does not support the prediction of the original knowledge gap hypothesis. One potentially important reason appears to be that the low education group has higher readership levels of the neighborhood papers than do the moderate education and high education groups.

3. Contrary to previous findings, conflict appears not to have contributed to reduced knowledge gaps in this study.

4. Knowledge gaps are largest for those issues on which the overall proportion having knowledge is highest; that is, distributing knowledge more widely does not necessarily lead to equalization of knowledge.

5. Organized groups' information strategies may have contributed to higher knowledge levels among the least educated, even though there was a gap between their knowledge levels and more educated groups' knowledge levels.

6. Study of the crime issue revealed that structure of many of the organized groups interested in this issue differs from the structure of many other organizations in that the majority of crime-oriented groups are block clubs, a grass roots association diffused throughout many parts of the neighborhood. Block clubs, loose organizations of neighbors who watch out for each others' houses and who try to report crime and suspicious behavior, were responsible for the highest level of group activity of the four issues studied and the largest knowledge gap. This raises questions about the role of group activity, including attempts to equalize the distribution of knowledge throughout the neighborhood. It suggests the need for further investigation of organized group activity on issues, examination of their information strategies, and study of consequences for equalization of knowledge.

FOOTNOTES

1 Principal support of this research was a dissertation grant, SES80-04480, from the National Science Foundation. Partial support was provided by the University of Minnesota Computer Center. Any opinions, findings, or conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect views of the National Science Foundation or any agent or department of the University of Minnesota.

The author is especially grateful to Professor Phillip J. Tichenor, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Minnesota, for his many insightful comments and thoughtful critique of an earlier draft of this paper. Special acknowledgment is made also of the beneficial comments of Professor Daniel B. Wackman, of the same department. Any errors are the sole responsibility of the author. Helpful assistance was provided by Margaret Longlet, interviewer and coder; Michelle Held, Linda J. Haugen, Nancy Foley, Nancy Gunderson, interviewers; Mary K. St. John, Haleh Mostafav Kashani, coders; and Randy Latimer, typist.

2 Spitzer and Denzin report that six other studies confirm this finding. They are Mendelsohn, Sheatsley and Feldman, Hill and Bonjean, Banta, and Burchard, all 1964 publications, and Spitzer and Spitzer, 1965.

However, Spitzer and Denzin (1965) divided a sample who knew of the Kennedy assassination into a "low informed" group and a "high informed" group, according to scores based on answers to four questions about the event. There was a gap in amount of knowledge held by each group. The low-informed group was characterized by being in blue-collar occupations, living in residential areas with lower housing values, being older, and being male.

3 For conditions of unaided recall, aided recall with details, and total recall, a very slight gap appeared. However, slightly more of the non-college group could recall news stories without details as compared with the college group. The gap between the two groups was negligible when types of news stories were divided into levels of low, medium and high abstraction.

4 However, the faculty community was canvassed about a day after the event and the laboring community not interviewed until three and a half days after Taft's death. The finding, therefore, may have been partly an artifact of time of interview. Also, a newspaper strike had idled the afternoon newspaper, a likely news vehicle for the faculty group to have used, and this could have affected their time of knowing as well.

5 Another campaign, on mental retardation, may be compared with this one. It influenced attitudes, but it did not increase overall knowledge levels in the treatment community (Douglas, Westley, and Chaffee, 1970). Although the grade school-educated group increased knowledge scores, the gain was slight, .41. Knowledge scores of the high school-educated group declined by .25 and those of the college-educated group decreased by .96.

6 New York City has had as many as 41 neighborhood publications (City Almanac, 1969) and as many as 38 have existed in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul (Gaziano and Ward, 1978).

7 The Chicago community press developed because of the decentralization of the business district, drawing circulation from the small geographical areas centering on secondary retail shopping areas. A few of those papers were village papers before Chicago annexed the villages, and some had existed as early as 1910. They did not include "shoppers" with primarily advertising content, since the community press had dealt shoppers a death blow (Janowitz, 1952).

8 Most of the Twin Cities' papers have appeared since 1970. Residents' associations or citizens' groups initiated most of them. Others were started by government agencies, private proprietors, local institutions and businesses. The majority are offset tabloids, and most have saturation distribution in their areas. Distribution is by door-to-door delivery, mail, drop-off at local businesses and institutions, or combinations of these (Ward and Gaziano, 1976). These papers fall into two broad categories. One is "neighborhood level," with circulations ranging from 1,000 to 9,000. The other is "community level," circulating to between 9,000 and 42,000 households within several adjacent neighborhoods (Ward and Gaziano, 1978).

9 Very few studies with evidence about knowledge gaps have systematically varied levels of media publicity about the topics studied, which variation is an important condition stated in the primary knowledge gap hypothesis.

10 Examples of the questions on knowledge are:

a. Now, I'd like to ask something about the housing problem. Have you seen or heard anything about it in the Phillips neighborhood? (If yes:) Can you tell me what you've seen or heard? (Probe)

b. Do you know of any people or organizations that have been trying to do something about this problem? (If yes:) Can you tell me something about that? (Probe)

c. What, in your opinion, is the cause of the housing problem in this neighborhood? (Probe)

d. Do you know of any ways to do something about the housing problem around here? (If yes:) What ways are those?

11 The method was by drawing a random sample of all blocks in the neighborhood with residential units and then by selecting households on the chosen blocks with a proportionate random method. Addresses of all telephone households on the blocks were obtained from a semi-annual street address telephone directory.

12 Of the 239 respondents, 208 (87%) were white, 13 (5.4%) were American Indian, 8 (3.3%) were black -- although 3 of these were foreign-born, 2 were Hispanic, 1 was Indochinese, and information about race was not known for 7 respondents. According to 1980 census data, the population of Phillips neighborhood is 8% black, 17.7% Indian, 8.6% Asian, Pacific Island and "other," and 65.7% white. No other demographic data are yet available for 1980. Although 60% of interviewing was in the evening, 40% of the sample was male and 60% female.

13 The range of scores on housing knowledge was 0-17, on economic development 0-12, on schools 0-10, and on crime 0-14. The coefficient of inter-coder agreement for coding both open-ended and closed-ended questions overall was .93.

14 No other racial groups were known to have organizations in the neighborhood.

15 School-related items were excluded from analysis if they concerned preschools, announcements of adult education classes, schools outside the neighborhood except for parochial schools which include Phillips within their parish boundaries, non-educational topics such as picnic announcements, and a children's page which appears in one of the papers.

16 Neighborhood residents knew of greatest activity on the crime issue, 117 mentions, followed by 102 citations of housing-oriented groups. The number of groups named for the economic development issue was 41 and for schools/education, 28.

17 Total mentions of groups known to be active on the issues, as described by the informants' sample, were: housing, 104; economic development, 79; schools/education, 62; and crime, 57.

Table 1. Proportions of respondents in each education group with and without knowledge of the housing issue.

Education	Do not have knowledge	Have knowledge	Row total
Low (less than high school degree)	26 (54.2%)*	22 (45.8%)	48 (20.9%)
Medium (high school graduate)	23 (38.3%)	37 (61.7%)	60 (26.1%)
High (some college or more)	44 (36.1%)	78 (63.9%)	122 (53.0%)
Column total	93 (40.4%)	137 (59.6%)	230 (100%)

$\underline{X}^2$ = 4.83497 with 2 degrees of freedom; p = .089.

Cramer's $\underline{V}$ = .145. (Missing observations = 9)

*Cell percentages are for rows.

Table 2. Proportions of respondents in each education group with and without knowledge of the economic development issue.

Education	Do not have knowledge	Have knowledge	Row total
Low (less than high school degree)	28 (58.3%)*	20 (41.7%)	48 (20.9%)
Medium (high school graduate)	41 (68.3%)	19 (31.7%)	60 (26.1%)
High (some college or more)	69 (56.6%)	53 (43.4%)	122 (53.0%)
Column total	138 (60.0%)	92 (40.0%)	230 (100%)

$\underline{X}^2$ = 2.39413 with 2 degrees of freedom; p = .302.

Cramers $\underline{V}$ = .102. (Missing observations = 9)

*Cell percentages are for rows.

Table 3. Proportions of respondents in each education group with and without knowledge of the schools/education problem.

Education	Do not have knowledge	Have knowledge	Row total
Low (less than high school degree)	32 (66.7%)*	16 (33.3%)	48 (20.9%)
Medium (high school graduate)	42 (70.0%)	18 (30.0%)	60 (26.1%)
High (some college or more)	71 (58.2%)	51 (41.8%)	122 (53.0%)
Column total	145 (63.0%)	85 (37.0%)	230 (100%)

$\underline{X}^2$ = 2.74677 with 2 degrees of freedom; p = .253.
Cramer's $\underline{V}$ = .109. (Missing observations = 9)

*Cell percentages are for rows.

Table 4. Proportions of respondents in each education group with and without knowledge of the crime and vandalism problem.

Education	Do not have knowledge	Have knowledge	Row total
Low (less than high school degree)	13 (27.1%)*	35 (72.9%)	48 (20.9%)
Medium (high school graduate)	11 (18.3%)	49 (81.7%)	60 (26.1%)
High (some college or more)	14 (11.5%)	108 (88.5%)	122 (53.0%)
Column total	38 (16.5%)	192 (83.5%)	230 (100%)

$\underline{X}^2$ = 6.27750 with 2 degrees of freedom; p = .043.

Cramer's $\underline{V}$ = .165. (Missing observations = 9)

*Cell percentages are for rows.

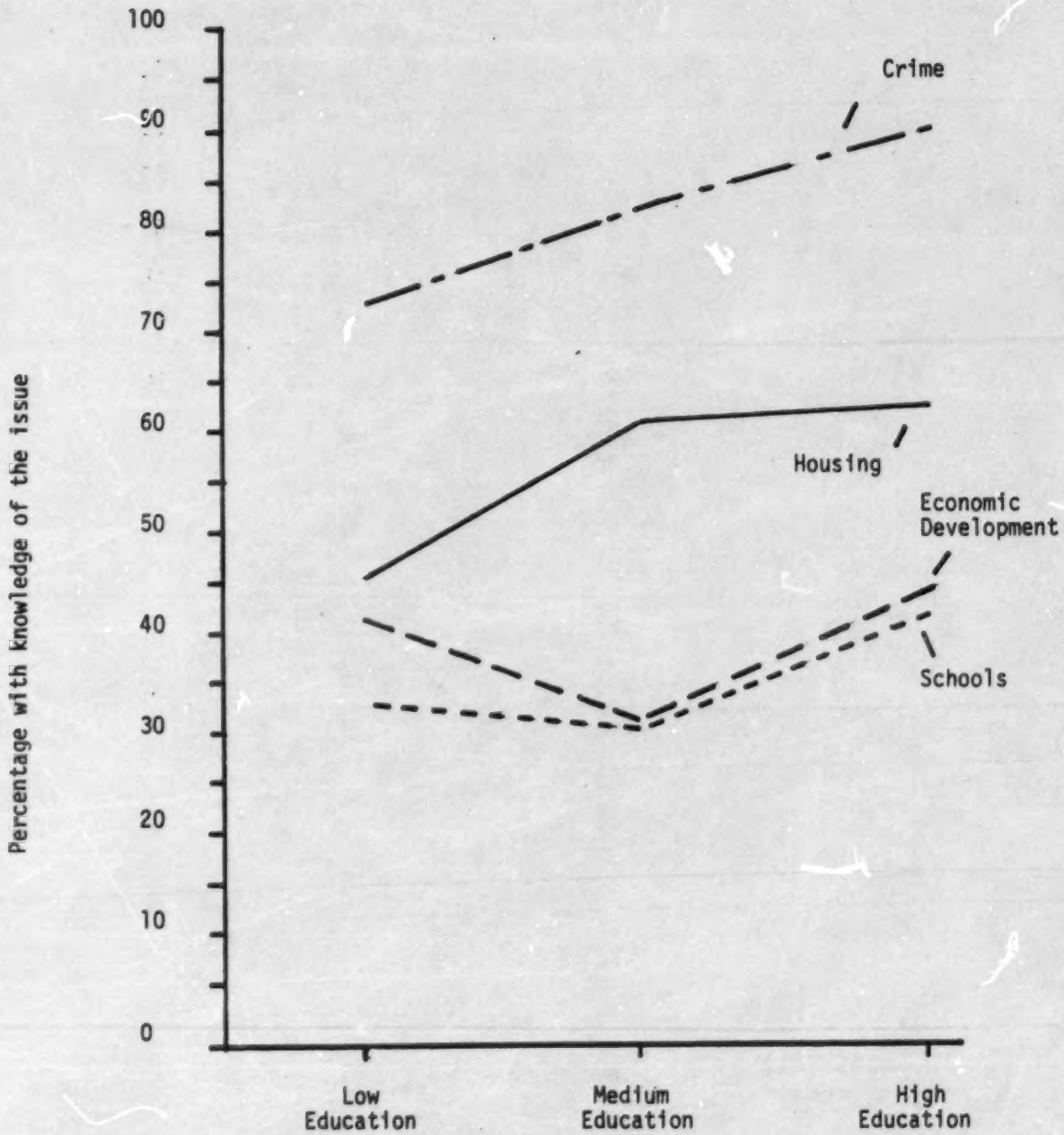

Figure 1. Proportion of each education group who have knowledge of each of the four local public affairs issues.

Table 5. Hypothesized knowledge gaps, according to variations in neighborhood newspaper publicity and organized group activity on the issues.

Amount of Neighborhood Newspaper Attention to the Issue	Amount of Organized Group Activity: High	Amount of Organized Group Activity: Low
High to moderate	Housing (smallest gap)	Economic development (largest gap)
Low	Crime (small gap)	Schools and Education (large gap)

Table 6. Findings on knowledge gaps, according to variations in neighborhood newspaper publicity and organized group activity on the issues.

Amount of Neighborhood Newspaper Attention to the Issue	Amount of Organized Group Activity: High	Amount of Organized Group Activity: Low
High to moderate	Housing V = .145	Economic development V = .102
Low	Crime V = .165	Schools and Education V = .109

REFERENCES

Adams, John B., James J. Mullen and Harold M. Wilson
1969 "Diffusion of a 'Minor' Foreign Affairs News Event." Journalism Quarterly 46:545-551.

Allen, Irving L. and J. David Colfax
1968 "The Diffusion of News of LBJ's March 31 Decision." Journalism Quarterly 45:321-324.

Anderson and Berdie, Associates, Inc.
1978a "The Dayton's Bluff Community," survey report. St. Paul, MN, November.

Anderson and Berdie, Associates, Inc.
1978b "The Hamline-Midway Community," survey report. St. Paul, MN, November.

Anderson and Berdie, Associates, Inc.
1976 "The North End Community," survey report. St. Paul, MN, October.

Anderson and Berdie, Associates, Inc.
1978c "The Payne-Phalen Community," survey report. St. Paul, MN, November.

Anderson and Berdie, Associates, Inc.
1978d "The St. Anthony Park Community," survey report. St. Paul, MN, November.

Anderson and Berdie, Associates, Inc.
1975 "The West Side/Riverview Community," survey report. St. Paul, MN, September.

Bagdikian, Ben H.
1981 "Newspapers Face Troubles, But They'll Still Be a Good Deal." Next 2:1:40-45 (January-February).

Banta, Thomas J.
1964 "The Kennedy Assassination: Early Thoughts and Emotions." Public Opinion Quarterly 28:216-224.

Benton, Marc and P. Jean Frazier
1976 "The Agenda-Setting Function of the Mass Media at Three Levels of 'Information Holding.'" Communication Research 3:261-274.

Berelson, Bernard R., Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee.
1954 Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Block, Carl E.
1970 "Communicating with the Urban Poor: An Exploratory Inquiry." Journalism Quarterly 47:3-11.

Bogart, Leo
1950- "The Spread of News on a Local Event: A Case History."
1951 Public Opinion Quarterly 14:769-772.

Brown, J. W., J. S. Ettema, and R. V. Luepker
1981 "Knowledge Gap Effects in a Cardiovascular Information Campaign." Paper presented to Association for Education in Journalism, East Lansing, Michigan (Michigan State University, August).

Budd, Richard W., Malcolm S. MacLean, Jr., and Arthur M. Barnes
1966 "Regularities in the Diffusion of Two Major News Events." Journalism Quarterly 43:221-230.

Burchard, Waldo W.
1964 "Reactions to the Assassination of President Kennedy -- A Preliminary Report (I)." Paper presented to the Midwest Sociological Society, Kansas City, MO.

Childers, Thomas with Joyce A. Post
1975 The Information-Poor in America. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.

City Almanac
1969 "News Media and Ghetto Problems: Community Newspapers in New York" and "Urban Reporting Project" 4(1):1-12.

Clarke, Peter and F. Gerald Kline
1974 "Media Effects Reconsidered: Some New Strategies for Communication Research." Communication Research 1:224-240.

Conason, Joseph
1975 "Community Newspapers: A Press for the People." The Nation 221:467-468 (November 8).

Converse, Philip E.
1962 "Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes." Public Opinion Quarterly 26:578-599.

Deacy, Jack
1971 "What the Big Dailies Don't Tell You About What's Going On in the City." New York (May 24, pp. 40-49).

Dervin, Brenda
1980 "Communication Gaps and Inequities: Moving Toward a Reconceptualization." In Brenda Dervin and Melvin J. Voigt, eds., Progress in Communication Sciences, Vol. II. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Dervin, Brenda and Bradley S. Greenberg
1972 "The Communication Environment of the Urban Poor." In F. Gerald Kline and Phillip J. Tichenor, eds., Current Perspectives in Mass Communication Research. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Deutschmann, Paul J. and Wayne A. Danielson
1960 "Diffusion of Knowledge of the Major News Story." Journalism Quarterly 37:345-355.

Donohue, G. A., P. J. Tichenor, and C. N. Olien
1975 "Mass Media and the Knowledge Gap: A Hypothesis Reconsidered." Communication Research 2:3-23.

Douglas, Dorothy F., Bruce W. Westley, and Steven H. Chaffee
1970 "An Information Campaign That Changed Community Attitudes." Journalism Quarterly 47:479-487.

Dreier, Peter
1982 "The Position of the Press in the U.S. Power Structure." Social Problems 29:298-310.

Edelstein, Alex S.
1973 "Decision-Making and Mass Communication: A Conceptual and Methodological Approach to Public Opinion." In Peter Clarke, ed., New Models for Mass Communication Research. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Erskine, Hazel Gaudet
1963a "The Polls: Exposure to Domestic Information." Public Opinion Quarterly 27:491-500.

Erskine, Hazel Gaudet
1963b "The Polls: Exposure to International Information." Public Opinion Quarterly 27:658-662.

Erskine, Hazel Gaudet
1962 "The Polls: The Informed Public." Public Opinion Quarterly 26:669-677.

Erskine, Hazel Gaudet
1963c "The Polls: Textbook Knowledge." Public Opinion Quarterly 27:133-141.

Ettema, James S. and F. Gerald Kline
1977 "Deficits, Differences, and Ceilings: Contingent Conditions for Understanding the Knowledge Gap." Communication Research 4:179-202.

Frankovich, Emily Weston
1974 "Community Action Press: Small Voices for Diversity." The Nation 218:495-497 (April 20).

Frazier, P. Jean
1981 "Trends in Attitudes Toward Fluoridation." Paper presented to the American Association for Public Opinion Research. Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania.

Frey, William H.
1980 "Black In-Migration, White Flight, and the Changing Economic Base of the Central City." American Journal of Sociology 85:1396-1417.

Gaziano, Cecilie
1974 "Readership Study of Paper Subsidized by Government." Journalism Quarterly 51:323-326.

Gaziano, Cecilie and Jean Ward
1978 "Citizen-Developed Neighborhood Press." Mass Comm Review 5(2): 14-18.

Genova, B. K. L. and Bradley S. Greenberg
1979 "Interests in News and the Knowledge Gap." Public Opinion Quarterly 43:79-91.

Greenberg, Bradley S.
1964 "Diffusion of News of the Kennedy Assassination." Public Opinion Quarterly 28:225-232.

Greenberg, Bradley S. and Brenda Dervin, with Joseph R. Dominick and John Bowes
1970 Use of the Mass Media by the Urban Poor: Findings of Three Research Projects. New York: Praeger Publishers.

Hill, Richard J. and Charles M. Bonjean
1964 "News Diffusion: A Test of the Regularity Hypothesis." Journalism Quarterly 41:336-342.

Hyman, Herbert H. and Paul B. Sheatsley
1947 "Some Reasons Why Information Campaigns Fail." Public Opinion Quarterly 11:412-423.

Janowitz, Morris
1952 The Community Press in an Urban Setting: The Social Elements of Urbanism.. (2nd ed., 1967) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Janowitz, Morris
1978 "Residential Community: The Geographic Dimension." The Last Half Century. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Jeffres, Leo and Jean A. Dobos
1982 "Communication and Neighborhood Development: A Survey of Three Cleveland Neighborhoods." Cleveland State University Communication Research Center. Monograph No. 4. Cleveland, Ohio.

Kotler, Milton
1969 Neighborhood Government: The Local Foundations of Political Life. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc.

Lamberton, Donald M.
1974 "National Information Policy." The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 412:34-43.

Larsen, Otto N. and Richard J. Hill
1954 "Mass Media and Interpersonal Communication in the Diffusion of a News Event." American Sociological Review 19:426-433.

Linnes, Laurie
1980 "The ECCO News Readership Survey." Unpublished paper. University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Lyle, Jack
1967 The News in Megalopolis. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company.

MacGregor, David
1979 "Managing and Financing Community Newspapers." Self Reliance 20:4-5, 13 (November).

McNelly, John T. and Julio Molina R.
1972 "Communication, Stratification and International Affairs Information in a Developing Urban Society." Journalism Quarterly 49:316-326, 339.

McNelly, John T., Ramona R. Rush, and Michael E. Bishop
1968 "Cosmopolitan Media Usage in the Diffusion of International Affairs News." Journalism Quarterly 45:329-332.

Medalia, Nahum Z. and Otto N. Larsen
1958 "Diffusion and Belief in a Collective Delusion: The Seattle Windshield Pitting Epidemic." American Sociological Review 23:180-186.

Mendelsohn, Harold
1964 "Broadcast vs. Personal Sources of Information in Emergent Public Crises: The Presidential Assassination." Journal of Broadcasting 8:147-156.

Milbrath, Lester W. and M. L. Goel
1977 "Political Participation and Constitutional Democracy." Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics? (2nd ed.) Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Company.

Neuman, W. Russell
1976 "Patterns of Recall Among Television News Viewers." Public Opinion Quarterly 40:115-123.

Nie, Norman H.
1970 Future Developments in Mass Communications and Citizen Participation. In H. Sackman and Norman Nie, eds., The Information Utility and Social Choice. Montvale, N.J.: AFIPS Press.

Olien, C. N., P. J. Tichenor, and G. A. Donohue
1982 "Structure, Communication and Social Power: Evolution of the Knowledge Gap Hypothesis." Paper presented at "Sommatie '82" conference, Veldhoven, The Netherlands (March 26).

Palmgreen, Philip
1979 "Mass Media Use and Political Knowledge." Journalism Monographs, No.61 (May).

Parker, Edwin B. and Donald A. Dunn
1972 "Information Technology: Its Social Potential." Science 176:1392-1399 (June 30).

Remmenga, Alvin J.
1961 "Has the Press Lost Its Influence in Local Affairs?" In Edward C. Banfield, ed., Urban Government: A Reader in Administration and Politics. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press.

Robinson, John P.
1972 "Mass Communication and Information Diffusion." In F. Gerald Kline and Phillip J. Tichenor, eds., Current Perspectives in Mass Communication Research. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Robinson, John P.
1967 "World Affairs Information and Mass Media Exposure." Journalism Quarterly 44:23-31.

Sargent, Leslie W. and Guido H. Stempel III
1968 "Poverty, Alienation and Mass Media Use." Journalism Quarterly 45:324-326.

Sheatsley, Paul B. and Jacob J. Feldman
1964 "The Assassination of President Kennedy: Public Reactions." Public Opinion Quarterly 28:189-215.

Smith, Alfred G.
1975 "The Primary Resource." Journal of Communication 25:2:15-20.

Spitzer, Stephan P. and Norman K. Denzin
1965 "Levels of Knowledge in an Emergent Crisis." Social Forces 44:234-237.

Spitzer, Stephan P. and Nancy S. Spitzer
1965 "Diffusion of the News of the Kennedy and Oswald Deaths." In Bradley S. Greenberg and Edwin B. Parker, eds., The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Star, Shirley A. and Helen MacGill Hughes
1950 "Report on an Educational Campaign: The Cincinnati Plan for the United Nations." American Journal of Sociology 55:389-400.

Suominen, Elina
1976 "Who Needs Information and Why." Journal of Communication 26(4):115-119.

Tan, Alexis and Percy Vaughn
1976 "Mass Media Exposure, Public Affairs Knowledge, and Black Militancy." Journalism Quarterly 52:271-279.

Tichenor, Phillip J., George A. Donohue, and Clarice N. Olien
1980 Community Conflict and the Press. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Tichenor, P. J., G. A. Donohue, and C. N. Olien
1970 "Mass Media Flow and Differential Growth in Knowledge." Public Opinion Quarterly 34:159-170.

Tichenor, P. J., C. N. Olien and G. A. Donohue
1977 "Community Organization, Newspapers, and Resistance to an Energy Project." Paper presented to the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research, Chicago (October 27-29).

Tichenor, Phillip J., Jane M. Rodenkirchen, Clarice N. Olien, and George A. Donohue
1973 "Community Issues, Conflict, and Public Affairs Knowledge." In Peter Clarke, ed., New Models for Mass Communication Research. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Wade, Serena and Wilbur Schramm
1969 "The Mass Media as Sources of Public Affairs, Science, and Health Knowledge." Public Opinion Quarterly 33:197-209.

Ward, Jean and Cecilie Gaziano
1976 "A New Variety of Urban Press: Neighborhood Public-Affairs Publications." Journalism Quarterly 53:61-67, 116.

Ward, Jean and Cecilie Gaziano
1978 "The Urban Neighborhood Press: A Citizen-Based Communication Tool." Ekistics 268:116-119 (March/April).

Weissman, Harold H.
1970 Community Councils and Community Control. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Winder, David
1972 "Focus on Community Newspapers." Christian Science Monitor (April 11, pp. 1, B15).

Worthy, William
1976 The Rape of Our Neighborhoods. New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc.